

“RICH IN FAITH.”

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Scripture Texts: James 2:5; II Corinthians 8:9; Hebrews 11:1

Introduction.

Have any of you kids ever played opposite day? You say opposite things like you hate ice cream or chocolate, you say goodbye when you greet someone, you put your shirt on backwards?

When you read your Bible it sometimes sounds like God likes to play opposite day. He likes to turn things upside down and backwards.

The meek shall inherit the earth.

Whoever wants to be leader must be servant.

Whoever humbles himself will be exalted, and whoever exalts himself will be humbled

Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

The first shall be last and the last shall be first.

God chose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and those who are rich are often poor toward God.

Our God is an upside-down God who rules over an upside-down kingdom.

God says to be anxious about nothing, to not worry about tomorrow, to not have doubts.

This is opposite of the world we live in and opposite of most of our lives. Think about the things you think about the most, what you worry about, what you are afraid of. Will God answer, will God provide, will God come through, where is God, what is He doing?

These are all questions that are addressed by the phrase be rich in faith.

If you are wondering why I am using this text, it is because the GLOW girls this year studied the book of James and this was one of their themes, one of their lessons, that seem especially helpful and applicable to all of us.

To be a Christian is to live life by faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Romans 14:23 Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

In other words, everything we do should come from a heart that loves and trusts God and relies on His love, forgiveness, wisdom and power. Total trust, total dependence. All that we do is to be done from faith by faith. So let's talk about faith and being rich in faith.

Let's start with definitions.

Rich. What does the word rich mean? Having a lot of, or an abundance of. Having lots of money or possessions. You can be rich in friends or grandkids, rich in love.

It means having lots of something, maybe even more than enough of it.

The world says be rich in money, in wealth, in things, in success, accomplishments, in friends, popularity, talent, influence.

God says the opposite, be rich in faith, hope, trust, dependence on God.

Faith. What does the word faith mean? Faith can mean belief, conviction or trust in something or someone, frequently without tangible evidence or proof.

This is opposite of how our world is and how we want to live. We want to walk by sight, not by faith. We want tangible, touchable, seeable, now. We want to have hope without having to have hope. But God says:

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

JBP Now faith means putting our full confidence in the things we hope for, it means being certain of things we cannot see.

Faith is taking possession now of a thing unseen, and yet to come. Faith believes God will keep His promises, even when you can't yet see the outcome.

Faith is the difference between believing in God and believing God. Faith is the bridge between knowledge and belief.

Believing in God means mental assent, it means knowledge of. The demons believe in God, they cannot deny that He is real, that He exists. Believing God means confident trust, it means total buy in. Faith sees the hand of God in all things.

Rich in faith.

So let's put them together, rich in faith. What does that mean? What does being rich in faith look like?

Having lots of faith. It is a deep trust, a strong belief and dependence on God.

But it isn't about quantity of belief, like having ten pounds or ten gallons of faith. It's about the quality of our trust in God. It is having a heart resting in God's promises despite circumstances. It is a confident reliance on God's character rather than on current circumstances.

It means trusting more in God who you can't see, than in the things of this world you can see.

It means striving to walk and live by faith and not by sight.

To be rich in faith is a relationship. It changes who you are and what you do. Believing God is like believing your house is on fire. It moves you to action.

To be rich in faith means valuing Christ more than you value the things of this world.

We are rich in faith when we see having Christ means we have everything and more than enough.

Philippians 4:11-13 I have learned, in whatever situation I am, to be content. ... In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Heirs of the kingdom.

To be rich in faith means also to be heirs of the kingdom, to have an eternal inheritance.

Girls, would you say you are rich or poor? You are probably thinking about someone else you think is rich and when you compare yourself to them you think you are not rich. Maybe they live in a nicer house, they have nicer clothes or toys or go on nicer vacations. Is that what makes us rich? Is it possible to have none of those things and be rich?

We have a lot of older people in our church. As we get older, we start to lose the things we used to have: our jobs, our houses, our cars, our husband or wife, maybe our kids and grandkids move away, we start to

lose our health and strength. After a while it can look like we have lost just about everything.

I was talking to an older woman I know. She no longer lives in her own home, she no longer has a car to drive, she has lost her husband, her kids don't live near her. She has very few possessions anymore. Her health has declined. Is she poor?

She told me she is looking forward to going to heaven to be with Jesus and her husband. She has confident faith that the richest inheritance is hers in heaven. She has lost just about everything on this earth we would say makes us rich, and yet she doesn't feel poor, she is rich in faith.

“Rich in faith is trusting Christ so deeply that losing everything else doesn't make you poor.”

You can have nothing in this world and yet be rich.

II Corinthians 6:10 As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

Think about what makes you truly rich in this world and in the world to come.

II Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Salvation, forgiveness, justification, being justified with God and reconciled to Him.

Being adopted by God by His Spirit of adoption to be one of His beloved children.

To have the indwelling Spirit of God and His peace, hope, love and joy.

To have the confident hope of eternal life and future glory.

To have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

How do we become richer in faith?

So what would you say about yourself? Are you rich in faith or poor in faith? Are you of little faith or great faith? Do you want more faith or do you think you are good to go? How can weak faith become strong and little faith become great?

What is one area in your life where you struggle to trust God right now? Where is your faith wavering? Where do need richer, deeper faith?

God didn't choose us because we were rich in faith, He chose us so we would become rich in faith. How do we become richer in faith? Let me offer half a dozen ways, take these to heart, put them in practice.

First, by fixing our eyes on the object of our faith, on Jesus. Not from looking inside, but by looking up.

Hebrews 12:2 Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.

II Corinthians 4:18 We look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Colossians 3:1-2 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Second, by hearing and receiving and believing the Word of God. By reading and listening to God's promises.

Romans 10:17 Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Third, by praying and asking God to give you more faith and trust.

Mark 9:24 I believe, help my unbelief.

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Fourth, by remembering and recounting God's past faithfulness to strengthen your confidence in His trustworthiness. Recalling those times when God's hand of help was especially evident strengthens your faith for the present and future. This is one of the blessings of being older.

“Recall the former days,” says the writer of Hebrews (10:32).

Psalms 77:11-12 I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.
12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.

We can trust God for the future based on what He has done in the past. God is trustworthy, He will be as faithful to His promises in the future as He has been in the past.

Fifth, by practicing thanksgiving and gratitude which reinforces the awareness of God's hand all around you.

Sixth, by regular fellowship with other believers who encourage and strengthen our faith.

Romans 1:11–12 For I long to see you, ... that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

I Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Seventh, by testing and trials. Don't despise God's discipline, He is treating you as His children. God tests us in the fire. God refines us by taking away things we trust in so we will be more dependent on Him.

Faith looks at life's trials and troubles and reinterprets them as God's proof of our sonship, that we are loved by Him. God is using them to grow our faith even richer and deeper.

I Peter 1:6-9 ... for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

As Christians in whom God is growing deeper, richer faith, we are going to suffer. It doesn't matter how strong or smart or rich or good we are, we are going to suffer. God will knock the props of self-reliance from under us so we lean into Him and trust Him.

The only question is how will you suffer? Will it be with a quiet, trusting confidence that this is from the hand of a loving God who is making my faith richer and preparing me for my inheritance? He is loosening our grip on the comforts, and prosperity, and delights of this life that make us forget God. We never see how strong and good God is until He shows us how weak we are.

When you see the canes and walkers and wheelchairs, the hearing aids and glasses, the slow-moving bodies, just remember they are signs, God is

giving us a richer faith in Him and getting us ready for the riches of His inheritance that He is keeping for us in heaven.

Let us acknowledge our weak faith and that we often stumble and fall. Let us trust our faithful, loving Father who knows what He is doing and will pick us up and carry us all the way home.

Implications and application.

What do you wish you had more of? Why do you wish that? Do you think it will make you happier or a better person?

Do you wish you had more friends, more popularity, were smarter or better looking, had more money or a better house or car? More success, an easier life, less problems, better health?

What if God isn't giving you those things because He wants you to trust Him and depend on Him more?

We all want to be rich, we all want more of what we have. If you want to be rich, why not want to be rich in something that will do you good all the days of your life. Why not be rich in something you cannot lose or have taken from you? Why not be rich in something you can actually take with you when you die? Why not want to be rich in faith?

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?